

# John Day approves funding for Grant County Coworks

Shared workspace for educational, entrepreneurial pursuits provides internet access

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

While internet connectivity is being addressed at Humbolt Elementary with a project to connect the school to John Day's fiber line, another facility is looking to provide an outlet to help the county overcome the trials of broadband while providing access to many resources.

Didgette McCracken, the Open Campus Coordinator at Oregon State University Extension, presented Grant County Coworks — a shared workspace for educational and entrepreneurial pursuits and technology — during the John Day City Council on Aug. 25.

Coworks will be a workplace where members will be provided with coaching and mentorship to provide one-on-one advising to help find funding, create a sustainable business strategy and launch their ventures, while providing local students with access to the technology, tools and mentorship necessary for online education, according to McCracken. Desks, computers, printers, phone charging stations and other items will be provided.

"We have this rural community that's very isolated, so how can we be doing what we do every day in a



Eagle file photo

**Didgette McCracken is the Oregon State University Extension Open Campus coordinator for Grant County, working out of the John Day office.**

different manner," McCracken said. "I think this is something that can help break that barrier and help fill that need."

McCracken talked about education, arts and culture and COVID-19 resiliency as the three barriers to overcome in the county that Coworks is planning to tackle to enable learning and accelerate innovation.

She said education was the first barrier she saw and added that there are adults and kids trying to do distance learning with limited connectivity.

"It's hard to do because you don't have (internet) access at your home, you might not be able to afford a laptop... it's a huge issue for our communities," McCracken said. "For people to better educate themselves or try to advance their degree, it is

very difficult here and, of course, now with COVID that's on another level. Education is just not something easily obtained here and this will help address that need."

Rod Ray of Canyon Mountain Consulting, which focuses on public-sector and nonprofit consulting, added that, along with education, this will help create an environment for people to start companies around peers and other people trying to do the same.

"In addition to the education part, this will also be like a catalyst to start little remote companies that are appropriate to that area," Ray said.

This will be a three-phase project with Phase 1 focusing on providing a facility in John Day, Prairie City and Seneca. Phase 2 will expand to new locations while improving the cur-

rent facilities, and Phase 3 plans to provide a multi-purpose technology and education center with many amenities for students, artists and entrepreneurs of Grant County, according to McCracken's presentation.

Phase 1 of the project will cost \$278,075 with the project costing \$124,025 for the first year in John Day, \$78,275 in Prairie City and \$75,775 in Seneca. Rent, furniture, scholarships and seed funds, equipment, general office supplies, internet and software are some of the items needed to start the first year of the facility.

Rent, scholarships, administration and computers are some of the big startup costs, and McCracken said this project will most likely need multiple funders to cover the project.

"We know that some folks don't have a computer at home for a reason so they're probably not going to maybe afford a membership to a site like this, so we can give scholarships to some students or new business owners or folks that are getting up and running," McCracken said. "That's a big piece that we put in here because we purposely looked at that and how we can make this successful."

Ray said they have been looking for funding from Sen. Ron Wyden, the Ford Foundation, the Oregon Community Foundation and local donors.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said the first phase will be evaluated after a year to see if the facility is being used. He said there

is a need for a facility like this due to problems with broadband and distance learning.

"With the possibility and maybe the probability that schools are going to close, there's going to be a lot of people who are disadvantaged because of their broadband access," Green said.

The city council approved giving \$15,000 from their COVID-19 relief funds from the state to Grant County Coworks, which will cover the cost of rent for the facility in John Day. The Grant County Digital Network Coalition also approved up to \$30,000 for Coworks, going toward rent and utilities in Seneca, website creation and branding for the John Day and Seneca locations.

While a specific location was not announced during the meeting, McCracken said Main Street in John Day will provide opportunities for space that will be usable and visible.

With \$15,000 provided from John Day, McCracken said the next step is to obtain the rest of the funding to complete Phase 1 to open and operate three sites while gathering local and regional stakeholders in the process.

They will also be presenting at the Prairie City City Council meeting in September, as well as Seneca. McCracken said there has been a positive response so far from their representation.

This project is a group effort led by Allison Field from Business Oregon, Ray, McCracken and Stephanie LeQueu from Oregon RAIN.

# John Day council establishes priorities for recreation and tourism

The principles will guide discussion during the RERC Summit in September

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The John Day City Council established guiding principles for investing in the city's recreation and tourism economy to lead the discussions during a virtual Recreation Economies for Rural Communities Summit in September.

The Environmental Protection Agency announced in October that John Day was one of 10 communities nationwide to be selected for the RERC planning grant.

While there is no dollar value associated with the grant, John Day City Manager Nick Green said in February that the city will receive help from a planning team to consider challenges and opportunities for the recreational activities prioritized and develop an action plan.

The five guidelines the city agreed to focus on are: create a sense of place; redefine main street as end-to-end within their business corridor; prioritize infrastructure investments in recreation, tourism, the arts and culture; create policies and programs that drive spending increases in tourism; and recreation and market with a purpose.

"These guiding principles are my attempt to capture many conversations that we've had



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

**John Day City Manager Nick Green talks during a council meeting on Aug. 25 about the five guiding principles for investing in John Day's recreation and tourism economy.**

with the councilors, city staff and various advisory committees and trying to set the tone for the type of things we want to discuss at the summit," Green said.

Councilor Shannon Adair said she feels strongly about including more businesses and not limiting Main Street to a couple of blocks.

"Our town is too small to separate Main Street into a couple of blocks, and I think it needs to include and go all the way through downtown and get all the businesses involved," Adair said.

Green said the new Dollar General store and a possible new bowling alley will help attract people to travel to the west side of Main Street.

For creating policies that drive spending, the city wants to focus on ATV use on the state highway, guided tours for regional destinations and improved maps, wayfinding and placemarkers in town.

"What we'll walk away with

at the end of the summit is a set of prioritized actions and a plan that we can implement," Green said.

The steering committee that participated in the discussions had different individual focuses in the city that highlighted the recreation economy, health and wellness, fishing and wildlife, education, arts and culture and regional opportunities.

**In other city news:**  
• Officials discussed a possible digital marketing campaign to improve John Day's online presence and create video content that could attract potential visitors to their website and community.

Straw to Gold, a Portland-based firm helping clients grow their reach through online and print marketing material, and Frontier Unlimited, an Oregon-based outdoors show that airs in the Pacific Northwest, Canada and the United Kingdom, were two organizations presented to the council that could help in creating



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

**Councilor Elliot Sky talks about the importance of John Day developing an online presence for tourism at a city council meeting.**

high-quality content such as 4K video.

No decision was made, but it will be discussed again in a future council meeting.

• The Oregon Department of Transportation's sidewalk enhancement project along Highway 395 will be delayed due to right-of-way acquisition

needed for stormwater management. Bidding will now begin in fall 2021 with construction in 2022, according to the agenda.

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